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SF's compost program key to healthier environment



fforts to help protect the environment often focus on the call to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. At the United Nations Climate Conference in December another initiative generated great interest-improving soil health to sequester carbon in topsoil.

Countries, cities, and advocates for regenerative farming practices, also known as agroecology, emphasized the ability of healthy soils and plants to pull carbon from the atmosphere and store it in soil. Cities can provide highly effective and ongoing support for this initiative by replicating San Francisco's urban compost collection

program. Composting reduces greenhouse gas emissions from landfills and allows farms to shift from chemical fertilizers to compost, a soil amendment that helps grow healthy produce.

According to the US EPA, agricultural activities contribute to emissions in multiple ways. Fortunately, it is possible to turn farms and rangelands into sinks that pull carbon from the atmosphere.

The MarinCarbonProject.org headed by John Wick spread a half inch

of compost on a ranch in Nicasio six years ago. The compost application was a single event. It activated the life web in the soil and native grasses that pull carbon from the atmosphere thrived. Every year since, scientists from UC Berkeley have measured significant increases of carbon in Wick's soil.

Healthy soils equal healthy planet

Scientists, activists, officials, and journalists highlighted sustainable agriculture at the UN conference as a key response.

France's Ministry of Agriculture introduced the 4/1000 Initiative which aims to increase organic matter in soils by 4 parts per 1,000 per year. The plan calls for planting more trees, using compost and other natural soil amendments, and growing a variety of plants in ways that increase photosynthesis.

Scientists say such practices have the potential to cool environments while producing more healthy food. They say these steps, if implemented widely, could prove highly effective in our efforts to address the challenge of climate change.

"Agroecology is a major tool in fighting climate change," said Fritjof Capra, a physicist and ecologist.

Several teams at the conference presented videos highlighting the importance of improving soil health. To see two clips being shared on social media, type the following titles into a search engine or YouTube:

- Soil Solutions to Climate Problems, Center for Food Safety
- Life in Syntropy, Agenda Gotsch

The people who created these films offer high praise for San Francisco's compost collection program and say many more cities should institute curbside composting.

Farmers know firsthand that applying compost made from food scraps and plant cuttings offers multiple benefits to our environment and our lives, including fixing carbon in topsoil, producing healthy food, and saving water.

So, please help create compost for local farms by placing ALL your food scraps and plant cuttings in your green compost collection bin.

RecycleMyJunk for large items

an Franciscans can recycle large or bulky items that are broken through a special collection program provided by Recology. It's called RecycleMyJunk and is available to City residents at no additional cost.

Materials collected through the RMJ program include broken appliances, worn-out furniture, and other damaged household items that are big or heavy. Many people utilize RMJ to recycle old mattresses. Residents wanting to give way large items in good condition should contact donation agencies such as Goodwill.

Here is how the RMJ program works:

- Residents schedule a collection appointment through RecycleMyJunk.com or call (415) 330-1300.
- Residents are asked to list the type of items they want collected. This helps Recology know what truck to send. For example, if a customer needs an old washer and dryer picked up, we send a truck designated to collect metal items.
- Your collection will be scheduled for a specific day. Customers are asked to place items at the curb early in the morning. If customers are unable to bring their items to the curb, they can request an inside collection for a fee.



Other items often collected through this program include old carpets, broken printers, and textiles such as clothes and shoes. Smaller items must be boxed or bundled. We recycle most of the material collected through the RMJ program.



Discarded items speak to larger obsession

an Francisco artist Jenny Odell is a very good researcher with a great eye for spotting interesting things in the trash. She used those talents to make a powerful statement about our culture of consumerism.

Odell recently completed the Artist in Residence Program at Recology

San Francisco's transfer station on Tunnel Road. While there, she looked through piles of trash dropped off by residents and small businesses.

What she found was a kind of archeological record of San Francisco living. Her project, The Bureau of Suspended Objects, resulted in a collection of 200



SF artist Jenny Odell collected 200 items, many still in working condition, from trash to create The Bureau of Suspended Objects.

items. Finds included a stylish jean jacket, a red rotary telephone, a joystick, a boom box, hit movies on VHS tape, and an antique adding machine.

As a self-described Internet artist, Odell researched the manufacturing and use of each object online. She then put her findings and images of the objects on her site: suspended-objects.org. Details include links to factories where items were made, biographies of inventors, and YouTube videos of product TV commercials. She also published the results of her work in a book.

For her Recology exhibition she presented dozens of objects along with her research; QR codes could be scanned to bring up related information. She also used a new technology called augmented reality to enable viewers to see an overlay image of a product when it was new.

Guests at her exhibition said "I remember that" and "We had one of those." Many of the items on display were in working condition, discarded because people purchased the next generation phone, office machine, or clothing style.

Odell's work demonstrates that even the cheapest and most disposable items have a vast and complex history and brings attention to the resources, time, and energy used in the production of these and all consumer objects.

We can do better: 50 percent of what goes in the black trash bin can be composted

Get invites to environmental films

nvironmental filmmakers have produced several award-winning documentaries in the last three years. And in recent months many film companies from different counties released additional movies advancing environmental themes.

The most recent films, more than their predecessors, highlight solutions to environmental challenges. Examples include growing fruits and vegetables in urban centers to provide fresh produce for children and initiatives advancing renewable energy, such as solar.

The benefits of recycling and composting - reducing landfill disposal, saving resources, sending nutrients back to farms, and creating local, green jobs - receive significant attention in these films.

By featuring examples of recycling and composting young filmmakers



show how these actions help protect the environment. Several filmmakers show compost programs as way for people in cities to support healthy soils and how that helps farmers grow healthy food.

Recology hosts free screenings of environmental films in San Francisco.

We have shown:

- Trashed, hosted by Jeremy Irons
- Waste Land, a film about waste pickers in Brazil
- Growing Cities, a profile of
- urban farming in America

 Chasing Ice, a documentary about melting glaciers.

In 2016 we hope to screen "Tomorrow," a new documentary about how people in different countries are attempting to solve some global ecological problems.

The film screenings we host are lowkey, community-based events. If you would like to receive email invitations to Recology-sponsored film screenings, go to RecologySF.com and sign up. Look for the "Nice-to-know" heading and the photo showing an email notice on a smart phone.

As part of our larger mission to advance recycling in San Francisco, we would like to show environmental films to groups and organizations across the city. If you would like us to show an environment film to a group you are affiliated with in San Francisco, please send us an email through the "contact us" form at RecologySF.com.

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